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"THEY DESPISED THE PLEASANT LAND."

Psalm 106, v. 24.

BY MRS. LYDIA H. SIGOURNEY.

The discoverers of America were cheered by the sight of fresh leaves, and fragments of trees, borne towards them by the Gulf stream, and by the flight of birds who seemed to bring the welcome of the shore.

THE adventurous vessel, whose sails unfurled
To pierce the shroud of this Western World,
Rejoiced as it neared the unknown shore,
At the floating flowers that the billows bore:
Even thus we hail on this sea of time,
Branches and wreaths from an unseen clime,
Fragrance that flows from a glorious strand,—
Despise not the breath of the Pleasant Land.

Birds of bright plumage, and tuneful note,
Hovering met the Explorer's boat,
With greetings sweet, and a truthful test
That their perils were o'er, and their labors blest:
So, breaks on the soul, as its haven draws near,
The welcome of angels, in melody clear.
Oh! list to the song of the white-wing'd band,
Despise not the voice of the Pleasant Land.

THE

LIFE AND WORKS OF GOETHE.*

THIS new life of Goethe inaugurates a new method in the composition of biographies, by subordinating the subjective laws of the biographer to those of the individual of whom he writes. Mr. Lewes rightly regards the individual organism as a thing of growth, modified, but not fundamentally changed, by the medium in which the growth is effected. To mark off the successive stages in the growth of this organism, and to describe the characteristics, to which they give rise become, therefore, the duty alone of the biographer. Connected therewith, however, are the relations which these bear to the general economy of the family, society, and the past and future condition of humanity. For genius itself, though visibly operating in the present, draws its succulence from the past, and projects its flowers into the future.

Governed by this method, Mr. Lewes could not fail to do justice to Goethe—to give him that elevated position in the scale of greatness to which his natural and acquired abilities so justly entitled him. Those who are invincibly doomed to judge of others by the little shifting standards within themselves—who gather up and crucify everything by the heterogeneous specialities that lie huddled up in their moth-eaten brains—will find much to add to, or take from, the merits of Mr. Lewes as the biographer of Goethe. For our own part, we look upon the work as the most successful attempt we have seen, to write out philosophically the life of an individual, as it hangs together by the laws of its own nature, and not according to the arbitrary and artificial judgments of men, or the fluctuating conventionalities of literary composition or rhetorical exigencies. Man's nature, as it reflects itself—as it pushes outwardly its own internal workings, is not at all so mysterious, as when disconnectedly drawn through the mystic brains of conceived

writers, more bent on their own canonization than on painting the life-history of the subject of their discourse.

Let no man seek to unravel the life of another through the distorted medium of the abortive canons of extinct theories, but let him become the true historian of the revelations of its own growth—of its stem, bud, blossom, and flowering—and then Biography becomes the living reflection of the realities of life, as well as their justification, whether they have mechanical regularity or original flights.

In this direction has Mr. Lewes labored, and, in doing so, has succeeded in weaving together the golden threads of Goethe's life, just as the laws of his being ruled that they should be woven—as multitudinous in their diversities, as sublime in their unity. Disregarding the perilous celerity of conception and production, so popular of late in literary as well as other labors, Mr. Lewes devoted ten long years to the study of his hero—looking at him through books and private letters—through manuscripts and the garrulity of the living; and above all, in taking down the whole psychological structure of the man as he detected it, so beautifully interwoven with, and drawn out in his own immortal productions. And yet the sciolist may fail to discover the fruits of his long literary parturition in the two volumes before us—so chastely simple is real art in its manifestations—so supremely modest in its spiritual outline.

In opening out the first chapter of Goethe's life, Mr. Lewes dwells but too briefly on the moral, intellectual, and physical relationship of children to parents, wherein the former may be blessed or cursed through the qualities inherited from the latter. *This law of transmission*—should it ever be fully evolved out of the laboring loins of humanity—must lead to a mental revolution in the judgments of men; must equalize disparities in the framework of society, which now as frequently drown the just in sorrowing humiliation, as they elevate the unworthy to sinful points of ostentatious display and supercilious pride. Charity must be born of organic moral elevation and knowledge, and not from the theoretically-twisted doctrines of a popular *Credo*.

Genitally considered, Goethe would seem in a measure to have been rather baptized than immersed in the flesh—having drawn vigor of body and mental balance from his father;—a happy disposition and the rudimentary forms of a winged imagination from his mother;—a butterfly love of women and a collateral taste for the aesthetics in dress from his ancestors. What an embryological preparation and capital for a long and happy life—broad-set sails, with all but plethoric winds—needing no orthodox blessing to spin it out to the harmonious tenuity of an evening shadow—its two poles having vigorous root in heaven and earth.

Fortune, therefore, smiled on the first dawns of Goethe's existence, giving him neither poverty nor riches, neither too many nor too few friends—leaving its current to flow gently on, without those outward and internal perturbations and struggles which so frequently darken the destinies of men—shaking the foundations of their nature, and drawing a curtain of

gloom over the landscape of their lives. An artist by nature as by circumstance, his great productions were drawn serenely from out the evenly-poised machinery of his life—reflecting, in quiet though beautiful colors, the pulsations of a well-regulated soul, itself the arsenal of inexhaustible treasures. What a happy area into which to have his genius cast! Born of plenty and adopted by refined and indulgent royalty, it could well reflect the warring elements of knowledge, like a calm lake the mellow beams from a tropical moonlight. There is, consequently, more amplitude of thought than of wounded and bruised feeling in his writings, more of sunshine than of storm—more of joyous exultation than the wailings of a heart in tribulation. The cup of bitterness was never pressed to his lips—he never inwardly and silently prayed that death might come in the robes of night to blot out blasted hopes, baffled ambition, crushed emotions, and the remorseless fatalities of a purposeless and checkered life.

It is not for us to say what particular bearing the freedom from the world's troubles may have had on the writings of Goethe; their odor is not the less agreeable to us from its not having come from crumpled flowers. Those, however, who refine on nature, have said that the urn of his soul, broken by misfortune, might have yielded sweeter music; its tones have gone deeper into the hearts of others, and in doing so, have opened out fresh fountains in the depths of his own nature. In this connection, we must give an extract from Mr. Lewes, with whose opinion, doubtless, our readers will generally agree:

"There may be some among my readers who will dispute Goethe's claim to greatness. They will admit that he was a great poet, but deny that he was a great man. In denying it they will set forth the qualities which constitute their ideal of greatness, and finding him deficient in some of these qualities, declare his title null. But in awarding him that title, I do not mean to imply that he was an ideal man; I do not present him as the exemplar of all greatness. No man can be such an exemplar. Humanity reveals itself in fragments. One man is the carrier of one kind of excellence, another of another. Achilles wins the victory, and Homer immortalises it: we bestow laurel-crown on both. In virtue of a genius, such as modern times have seen equalled only once or twice, Goethe deserves the epithet of great; unless we believe a great genius can belong to a small mind. Nor is it virtue of genius alone, that he deserves the name. Merck said of him, that what he lived was more beautiful than what he wrote; and his life, amid all its weaknesses, and all its errors, presents a picture of a certain grandeur of soul, which cannot be contemplated unmoved. I shall make no attempt to conceal his faults. Let them be dealt with as harshly as severest justice may dictate, they will not eclipse the central light which shines throughout his life. He was great, if only in large mindedness—a magnanimity which admitted no trace of envy, of pettiness, of ignoble feeling, to stain or distort his thoughts. He was great, if only in his lovingness, sympathy, benevolence. He was great, if only in his gigantic activity. He was great, if only in self-mastery, which subdued rebellious impulses into the

* The Life of Goethe: by G. H. Lewes. Ticknor & Fields, Boston.

direct path prescribed by his will and reason. This man, we may say, became morally great, by being, in his own age, what, in some other ages, many might have been, a genuine man. His grand excellence was this, that he was genuine. As his primary faculty, the foundation of all others, was Intellect, depth and force of Vision, so his primary virtue was Justice, was the courage to be just. A giant's strength we admired in him; yet strength ennobled into softest mildness. The greatest of hearts was also the bravest; fearless, unwearied, peacefully invincible."

The youth of Goethe has no marked features of interest, save his great linguistic aptitudes, which bordered on abnormal precocity—too frequently the sure index of a defective growth. His filial relationship to his father was purely mechanical, and cerebrally cold; and that to his mother—withstanding its juvenile dash of spontaneity—was not morally subordinate enough to give her that maternal supremacy, so beneficial in its results, where not vitiated by incapacity. For his sister, Cornelia, his attachment, though strong, was not such as to leave any visible or permanent impression on his character or conduct.

In this family tableau, there are no heart-fermentations—no affectional emotions—no self-sacrifices, that might serve as a fitting interlude to Goethe's entrance into society, or to qualify him to appreciate, with a noble charity, the frightful degradations to which social irregularities lead, on the great stage of human existence. It is only through the heart that we hold fellowship with our kindred—that we form manifold links of sympathy with our fellowmen, in every stage of life, and form bonds of union with them, too strong to be broken by the material and moral vicissitudes to which we are all so painfully subject in this world.

What a striking exemplification of this does Goethe give in his intercourse with other boys. With them he is heartlessly fastidious, narrow and selfish—finically elective where he should be spontaneously liberal and general in his likings—unable to make up in intensity what he lacked in expansiveness. It is due to this that his world-life had but few more edifying ramifications than his family-life—that his experiences hung but upon a segregated few of the innumerable and varied links in the great chain of human existence. Coiled up within his own regal individuality, and knit to a few stems of Aristocracy, he was ignorant of the great, though lowly, souls of humanity, which spiritually throb in countless numbers through the intermingling substrata of humble life. It is to this, also, that is due the haughty exclusiveness of his intellect, its satanic pride, appealing to the few and despising the many, obsequious to the rich and supercilious to the poor. Into the deep, broad heart of Germany, Goethe never fully entered, but into its intellect he not only penetrated thoroughly, but reigns there paramount.

The idolatry of the intellect in the eighteenth century has been prolonged, under certain modifications, throughout the present century—assuming many malignant forms in its industrial and commercial manifestations. In the personality of a man of genius like Goethe, it is greatly redeemed and sanctified, not only by the exalted ap-

preciation of it, but also by its own eminent qualities. Whereas, in the present day, it is seldom married to any ennobling mission, or vitalized by any unusual original elements.

Goethe would have been an organic masterpiece of our race, if the spiritual impulses of his heart had been in fitting harmony with the broad, penetrating, and brilliant qualities of his mind. And it would have been well for Mr. Lewes if he had fully recognized true greatness as being alone possible from the moral hymen of these two great factors of our nature. Failing to do so, his conception of Goethe's greatness is feeble, fragmentary, and imperfect, and leaves his general estimate of him, however genial in its nature and spirit, very partial and unsatisfactory.

There is no truer mode of measuring and estimating a man's moral nature than by his relationship to woman in his varied and distinct capacities of a friend, a lover, and a husband. Historically considered, woman has been the great moral fulcrum from which society has evolved its different and successive stages of spiritual progress, and it is through her that it is destined to do so. This is as evident in the metaphorical poetry of theology as it is in the sober, literal, and rigid prose of science. To woman's superior moral nature has been given the grand prerogative of elevating man, spiritually, where he is not too brutalized to degrade her; for the sweet incense of her own heart can only purify him when his own natural proclivities incline thereto. Through the maternal agency is effected that initiatory step in his moral growth which is carried forward, matured and perfected by the wife, provided marriage has in his eyes that high moral significance which it took from the founder of Christianity, when it sought to put out the consuming fires of the flesh, to give new wings to the spirit, and to quicken every relationship of life into that great moral resurrection, the results of which shall become more visible and tangible as the ages roll away. To love, rooted in the heart, is due that enduring tie of the mother for her offspring, which neither time, change, nor distance can impair or obliterate; which ends only with life, or a moral declension in her nature. Her heart is a stranger to that bald arithmetic and ossified logic of the head which consume the most fertile affections, the most lofty aspirations, and which, on their ruins, erect a pantheon to their own maculate idolatry of selfishness and crushing pride.

Man, on the other side, yielding to turbulent passions, to muscular grossness, to intellectual materialism, to corroding mercantilism—absorbs and crucifies everything in the vortex of his satanic calculations, and puts the heart and its glowing emotions through the pitiless ordeal of a Mephistophelean brain, which weighs and measures them as so many particles of inorganic matter. As a friend, he is a multiplication table; as a lover, a furnace of passion; as a husband, the keeper of a domestic ledger of family expenses, and as a father, the organ of blind animal instinct—materially provident, until the individuality of the offspring crops out into something morally and mentally marked, when the physical paternity, unable to shoot up into a spiritual atmosphere, dies out from licentious inanity.

Let us now turn from these generalities to the individual case of Goethe himself, in order to corroborate their truth in the life even of a man of real genius.

As a friend, Goethe, from a liberal point of view, is a blank, a mere ephemeral spark, springing out of a dead mass of cold indifference, painfully apparent in the effort itself of his biographer to render him otherwise. To him, humanity was but a splendid fragment, detached from its infinite base, and solitarily hung up in the narrowly exclusive temple of the intellect.

As a lover, he is an amphibious animal, with a cruel capacity of locomotion, but none for heart-anchorage, ingeniously covering the barrenness of his heart by the plenitude of his brain, and cleverly concealing the struggling cross-currents of his passions under the rich hues of an impulsive imagination. His intellect was a kind of amorous trap, into which he pressed the young, the innocent, and the beautiful, coldly drawing out the perfume of their affections, using it, and then callously committing it to the winds. Nothing but the engulfing surges of selfish passion could lead a man of serious studies, personal gravity, and of great social dignity, like Goethe, to embitter so many hearts, and to use all the forces of his versatile nature to entangle and win affections which he doomed to sudden death. How many an angel of purity has been swept away in the hurricane of passion by mistaking it for affection! Passion in Goethe supplanted love; poisoned his moral nature, and partially left him a stranger to the tender and mollifying influences of true family and social connections.

As there can be no true marriage that does not grow out of the purest affections of the heart, and as there can be no true conjugal or parental life that is not consecrated by marriage, we shall forbear speaking of Goethe as a husband and as a father, inasmuch as it may be truly said that he never, spiritually, passed through these two beautiful phases of existence.

In thus running the character of Goethe through the critical crucible, and in thus coming down to the close of his life, we regret that a lack of space prevents us from giving a special estimate of him as a poet and a man of science; two orbits in which he moved with great original power, leaving in the one case living monuments of his poetical preëminence, and the other anticipatory intuitions of very remarkable discoveries. On some future occasion we shall probably accomplish this by a review of Faust and his scientific labors.

TRUE taste is for ever growing, learning, reading, worshipping, laying its hand upon its mouth because it is astonished, casting its shoes from off its feet because it finds all ground holy, lamenting over itself and testing itself by the way that it fits things. And it finds whereof to feel, and whereby to grow in all things; and, therefore, the complaint so often made by young artists that they have not within their reach materials or subject enough for their fancy, is utterly groundless, and the sign only of their own blindness and inefficiency; for there is that to be seen in every street and lane of every city—that to be felt and found in every human heart and countenance—that to be loved in every roadside weed and moss-grown wall, which, in the hands of faithful men, may convey emotions of glory and sublimity continual and exalted.—*Ruskin*.